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SUBJECT: Ontario Criticizes New U.S. Ozone Standards

Ref: 07 Toronto 251

Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Ontario's Ministry of the Environment today issued a press release criticizing the new U.S. federal ozone standards of 75 parts per billion (ppb), announced this week by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as not being strong enough. The Ministry's release argues that many cities located in southern Ontario will not be able to meet the Canadian federal government's more stringent ozone standards of 65 ppb because on hot summer days over half of the ozone in Ontario originates in the U.S. and the U.S. standards are too lax. In 2007 Ontario issued 13 smog advisories covering 39 days (below the 2005 record of 15 smog advisories covering 53 days). Ontario officials will continue their efforts to improve air quality north of the U.S. border. We expect them to continue to closely monitor and to criticize U.S. pollution standards that lag behind those set in Canada. It also is fair to note, however, that Ontario's coal-fired power plants emit more pollution than most U.S. coal-fired plants, and that a good portion of those emissions drift across the border into the United States.

¶2. (U) Begin Text of Ontario Press Release.

The new air quality standards for ozone announced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) this week aren't strong enough to safeguard public health and our environment on either side of the border.

The Ontario government is reacting to the EPA's decision to reject the recommendation put forth by its own Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee to aggressively lower the ozone standards. Although the revised ozone standards of 75 parts per billion (ppb) are an improvement over the old U.S. standards, these new standards are still weaker than what we have in Canada.

Ground-level ozone is one of the main ingredients in smog and is a serious health threat, especially to children and seniors. There are no "safe" levels of smog. Even at low levels, ground level ozone can be harmful. Ozone can also cause damage to crops, other vegetation and forested ecosystems.

Smog is also a problem in many Ontario cities, particularly those near the Canada-U.S. border. On hot summer days, over half of Ontario's ozone comes from sources in the U.S. Due to wind and proximity, Ontario cannot sufficiently control its own ozone levels without cooperation from the United States.

QUOTES

"There's nothing as basic as clean air - whether you live in Ontario or Pennsylvania or New York. A more protective standard from the U.S. EPA, closer to the one we have in Canada, would have meant fewer smog days for people on both sides of the border," said Environment Minister John Gerretsen.

"Ontario is taking real steps to clean the air we breathe and the

air that causes problems for our neighbours. We are phasing out coal, building public transit and have capped smog causing emissions from industry," Gerretsen added.

QUICK FACTS

--Ontario filed comments with the U.S. EPA on September 7, 2007 on its proposed ozone standards. We recommended they adopt a standard at least as stringent as the Canada-wide standard of 65 ppb. The U.S EPA announced ozone air quality standards of 75 ppb. This is only a slight decrease from the previous U.S. standard for ozone, which was 80 ppb.

--There are no "safe" levels of smog. It aggravates heart problems, bronchitis, asthma, and other respiratory problems and can even reduce lung function in healthy people.

--Ontario recently strengthened the protection of local air quality by introducing 19 new or updated air standards for 14 toxic substances under O. Reg 419/05 Air Pollution - Local Air Quality (<http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/news/2007/083101.php>)

End Text of Press Release.

NAY